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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CJAN](#) [KCRM](#) [EUN](#) [KTIA](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIUM: MLAT TREATIES TO DEBUT IN PARLIAMENT

REF: A. BRUSSELS 0021

[1](#)B. 2008 BRUSSELS 1965

[1](#)C. 2008 BRUSSELS 1953

[1](#)D. 2008 SECSTATE 1199

Classified By: A/DCM Richard Eason for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) PolOff and PolIntern met with Foreign Minister De Gucht's Cabinet Director for Parliamentary Affairs Lieve De Cock and Ann De Ridder from the MFA Treaty Department March 4 to discuss the progress of the draft ratification legislation for the US-EU Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements. Our contacts reported that the draft legislation is in Parliament and would first be reviewed by the Senate Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee within a few weeks. Following committee review and possible debate, they would be introduced into the Senate plenary. After passing the Senate, they would then make their way to the House Committee, and then the House plenary. De Cock said most treaties are debated and reviewed in the Senate committee, and usually pass both plenary sessions and the House committee with little debate. De Cock will be representing De Gucht during the committee hearings on the treaties, and assured us she would have specialists from the Department of Justice present to answer technical questions. Through this strategy, the government hopes to steer away from a political discussion and focus on technical aspects of the treaties. Our contacts emphasized their cautious strategy, saying the treaties were unlikely to be controversial and estimated passage before June.

[1](#)2. (C) Our contacts recommended that the U.S. approach to the agreements be discreet, in order to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to what the government considers good drafts. They strongly recommended that any U.S. lobbying should be through informal channels. She advised against targeted meetings with parliamentarians or writing letters in favor of the agreements, but said she would let us know when and if she thought active U.S. lobbying would be helpful. However, both interlocutors said informal discussions on the margins of other meetings where members of the committees were present would be productive, and perhaps elicit committee member opinions on the treaties that could be useful.

[1](#)3. (C) Our contacts said the Belgian Parliament usually holds EU legislation in high regard, and predicted a prompt passage. They warned that questions from parliamentarians are not always predictable and mentioned a few members of the committees that tend to be more inquisitive. Several members of the two committees have been invited to representational events in the next few weeks, and we will look for opportunities to mention the agreements on the margins.

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